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AUTHOR Edwards, Dan W.
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ABSTRACT

To empirically verify the usefulness of self-help approaches to coping with life problems and to help meet the needs of single fathers who had custody of their children, a self-help group composed of seven recently divorced fathers was formed. All seven participants were receiving individual counseling for various psychological problems they were experiencing as a result of divorce. In one group meeting participants identified what they would like to learn about in the areas of child rearing and homemaking. Fathers were then asked to rate each of the areas with regard to how serious each problem or concern was for them. The group met on a weekly basis over an 8-week period for approximately 2 hours each time. Pre- and post-intervention comparisons were made of each participants' rating of his own concern or difficulty with child rearing and homemaking. Findings suggest that participation in a self-help learning group may effectively help recently divorced fathers who have custody of their children. (RH)

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A Self-Help Learning Group On Child Care and Homemaking for Recently Divorced Fathers: A Case Study

by Dan W. Edwards, Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTION

The past decade has witnessed increasing attention and use of self-help groups in responding to the full range of social and psychological problems experienced by adults. However, a review of the literature reveals a paucity of information about the use and usefulness of self-help groups for helping adults cope with and or resolve various life problems.

This particular study was derived from the investigators long term interest in and commitment to empirically verifying the usefulness of self-help approaches. Of no less importance were the findings of an earlier study of 40 single parents and 40 intact families. More specifically, this study suggested that recently single fathers who had custody of their children experienced a number of common problems and concerns. Many fathers expressed concerns centering around increased expenditures for baby-sitters and such as well being ill prepared to do much cooking at home. More serious problems were reflected in difficulty with attending to household chores and caring for very young children. (1)

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Another study, "Self-Perceived Benefits of a Self-Help Group for the Recently Single Again," served as a rationale for organizing a self-help learning group for recently divorced fathers, and this case study. This study offered empirical support for the positive effects, from the perceptions of participants, that a self-help group had in the areas of

psychological, social, and emotional problems. (2)

Purpose

The purpose of this group was to provide a vehicle for seven recently divorced fathers to obtain mutual support amd help with commonly expressed concerns and problems associated with or resultant from suddenly becoming responsible for child caring and homemaker responsibilities, which were not previously a primary factor in their life. Further, all seven participants were receiving individual counseling for various psychological problems they were experiencing in relation to their divorce. The self-help group was initiated as an adjunct to professional treatment.

It should be pointed out that some consideration was given to suggesting that these fathers participate in Parents Without Partners, Inc. However, the investigator had previously received complaints about this organization. Also, in 1966, Elizabeth T. Harris reported on Parents Without Partners, Inc., as a resource for clients. She noted that advocates viewed it as a panacea for single parents, but that its critics saw pitfalls for the emotionally unstable involving pressure or pursuit of sexual relations and remarriage. (3)

Methodology

The seven recently divorced fathers were seen in one group meeting to identify various problems and concerns they would like to learn more about in the areas of child rearing and homemaking. The fathers were then asked to rate each of the areas with regard to how serious each problem or concern was for them. This approach was based upon common sense lines suggested by Coopersmith, that is, if you want to know a

person's perceptions of something ask him. (4) Following this same line of reasoning, the remainder of the group session focused on helping the fathers design a self-help learning group that they could run without the supervision of a professional, over an eight week period of time. The group met on a weekly basis for approximately two hours each time. A couple of guest speakers were invited, including a home economist who taught them about cooking and marketing. The other speaker was a social worker who talked about early childhood development and answered questions. Other meetings focused on sharing books and articles the fathers read as well as sharing with each other certain child rearing and homemaking skills they felt comfortable with.

In an effort to bring some objectivity to evaluating the group individual interviews were held with each participant, and each was asked to rate his self-perceived degree of concern or difficulty pertaining to the two major areas of child care and homemaking both before participation in the group, and eight weeks later. Thus, each participant in the learning group served as his own control. A t test for testing the significance of the difference between means based upon repeated measurements taken on the same subjects was utilized. Subjects in the groups had a mean age of 38, and all could be categorized as white, middle-class Americans.

Findings

Table I presents a comparison, of pre and post subject ratings regarding homemaking.

Table I
Participant Ratings of Homemaking
Skills and/or Problems

Subject	Pre	Post	Differences	D^2
1	2	4	2	4
2	3	4	1	1
3	1	3	2	4
4	2	3	1	1
5	3	3	0	0
6	3	4	1	1
7	2	5	3	9
			D=10	D^2 =20

t=7.0
p .01 for 6df

As can be seen from the data in Table I, the probability was greater than .01 for 6 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected as differences were statistically significant in the direction predicted.

Table II presents a comparison of pre and post participant ratings as to child rearing.

Table II
Participant Ratings of Child Rearing
Concerns and/or Problems

Subject	Pre	Post	Difference	D^2
1	4	4	0	0
2	2	3	1	1
3	3	4	1	1
4	2	4	2	4
5	2	4	2	4
6	2	4	2	4
7	3	4	1	1
			9	15

t= 2.9
p .025 for 6df

Data in Table II reveals that the probability was greater than .025 for 6 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected as differences were statistically significant in the direction predicted.

Individual interviews with each of the participants served to further support that the self-help group did appear to be a worthwhile experience for the single-parent fathers It may also be of some value to note that four of the participants continued to meet on their own and at 1st contact, were considering helping other recently divorced fathers to orgaznize a self-help group for the same purpose.

Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that participation in a self-help learning group on homemaking and child rearing may serve as a viable mutual learning and support system for recently divorced fathers. It would also appear that this form of adult education may serve as a viable adjunct to professional services offered by social workers, adult educators, and other practitioners in the field of social welfare.

Of course, there exists a need for future research to both replicate this study with additional groups of people, as well as to provide empirical data from various sections of the country before any broad generalizations can be made.

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